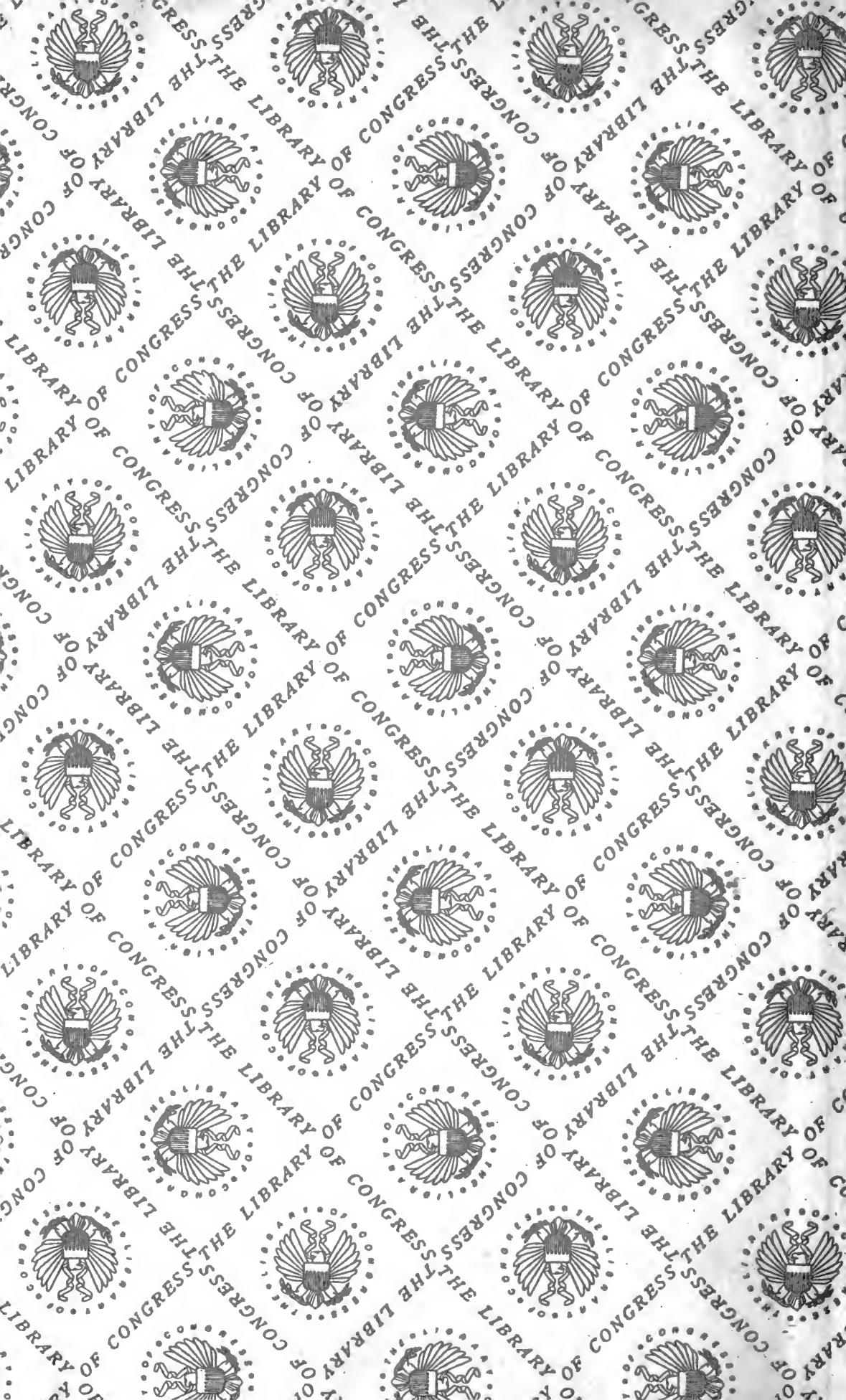
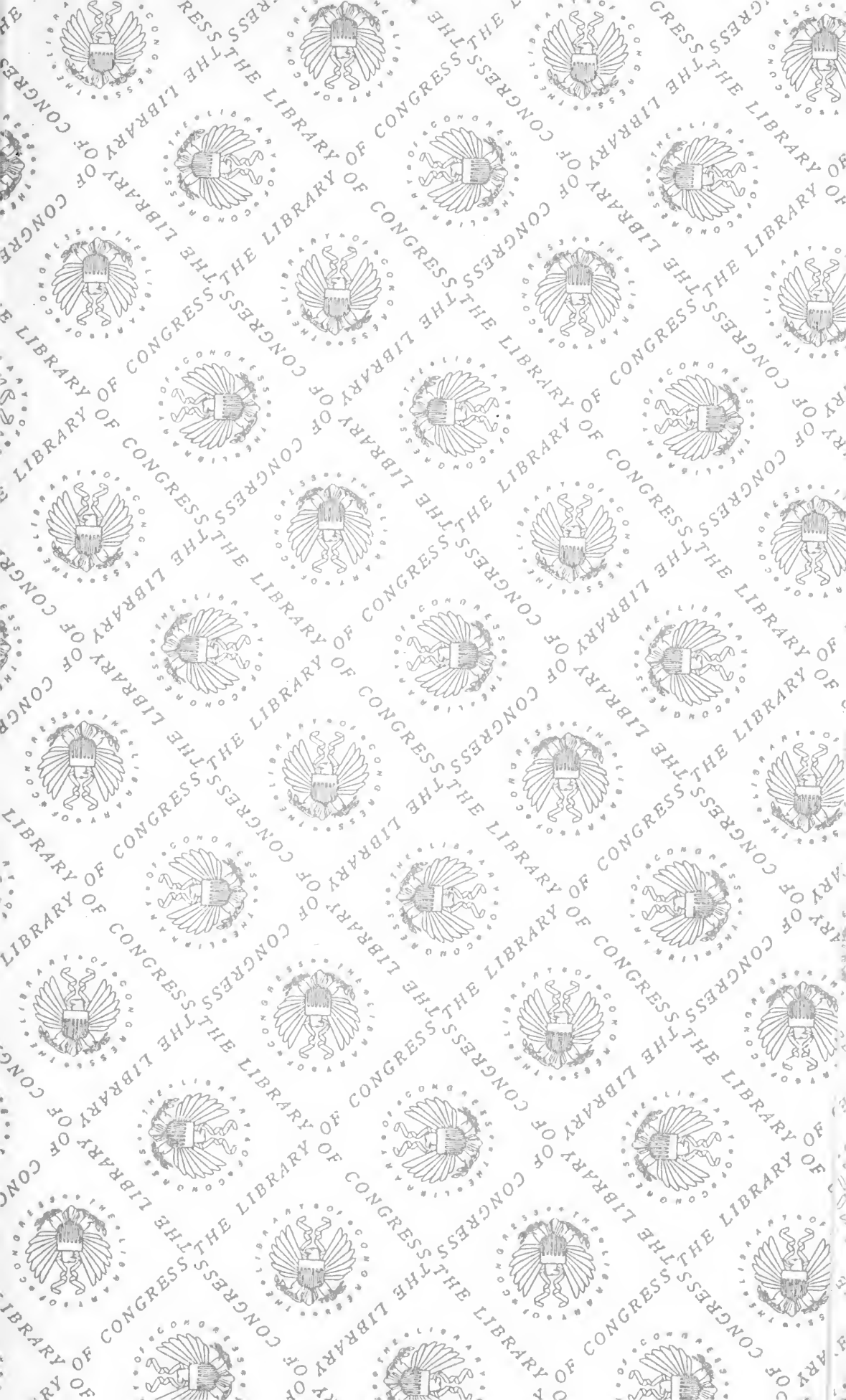


**PS 1719**

**.F58 B7**











Oct. 16/01.—

from J. L. French.

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# A BREATH OF DESIRE

XXVIII SONNETS

B'Y

JOSEPH LEWIS FRENCH

"

*When desire of which mortals are born is flame-winged then is  
song seen of men.*

BOSTON

1901

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PS 1719

F58B7

Gift  
Gustave O. Wiklund  
Sept. 27, 1939



*It is not enough to see, though the gift of seeing be strong,  
Seeing and song seemed one, yet my lyre was always mute,  
My soul rose poised as a seer's to the peaks of the hills of song,  
But below an echoless valley smote, like the touch of Dead Sea fruit!*

The edition of this book is limited to 250 copies, printed from types at the Heintzemann Press, Boston, in March – April, 1901. This is No. *183*.

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I  
*LETHE*

**P**ALE elegies of dream that court my soul,  
Why are ye faithless to the vision's core?  
Ye stand like wraiths upon that farther shore,  
Where none may beckon for his shapeless dole,  
Where neither cloud nor ray of Fancy's whole,  
Shall interpenetrate, while more and more  
Far-off, resounding, swells the infernal roar,  
Of twilight shades where Stygian waters roll.

Oh! lost Endymion, Oh! soundless sleep,  
Oh! pale sweet stars, Oh! heavenly mystery,  
Why do ye summon when the Soul must weep  
In endless years the calm of days to be,  
Why does your panoply of joyance knell  
All life's desire like to a funeral bell?

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II  
*FAITH*

**H**ERE tides and oceans meet, here mighty  
waves

Seek reflux waves that roar against the sun,  
Dawn, day, and dark, morning and night, are  
one,

And morn and even are as open graves,  
Thoughts, hopes, emotions, are the moil of  
slaves.

The voice of Life is as a signal gun  
Proclaiming that the conflict has begun,  
The struggle that shall waste all, or that saves!

There is no gleam; the day star from on high —  
The dawn of hope — the resurrection morn  
Seem blotted from the precincts of the sky,  
And each hour, in dire doubt and stress, is torn  
Some fragment from the storm-tossed soul and  
worn,  
The lorn white soul that seeks a Calvary!

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III  
*JUSTICE*

**I**N weaker years I knew philosophy,  
And felt the tiring-hand of Justice fall  
Enveloping my spirits like a pall—  
Frail mock of men who would be worldly free,  
Who seek content as 't were a shoreless sea;  
Who feel not ever how the years may call  
Adown Life's courts unto Time's Judgment-  
Hall,  
Who reckon that still no saving word can be.

No message from the great Eternal Gain  
May solve such minds; no continence of pain  
That seeks surcease in every wave of woe.  
So fares life ever; through the years that stain  
We mock our toil with this dumb outward show  
Of baubles that shall fret the fool in vain.

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IV  
*SONG*

“GILDING pale streams with heavenly  
alchemy”

I masked in dreams the spirit's outward show,  
And mocked my days with one mellifluous flow  
Of words that were a whole world's travesty.

I sought in vain the living entity  
In that which any man who ran might know,  
The careless laughed — wise men would graver  
grow,

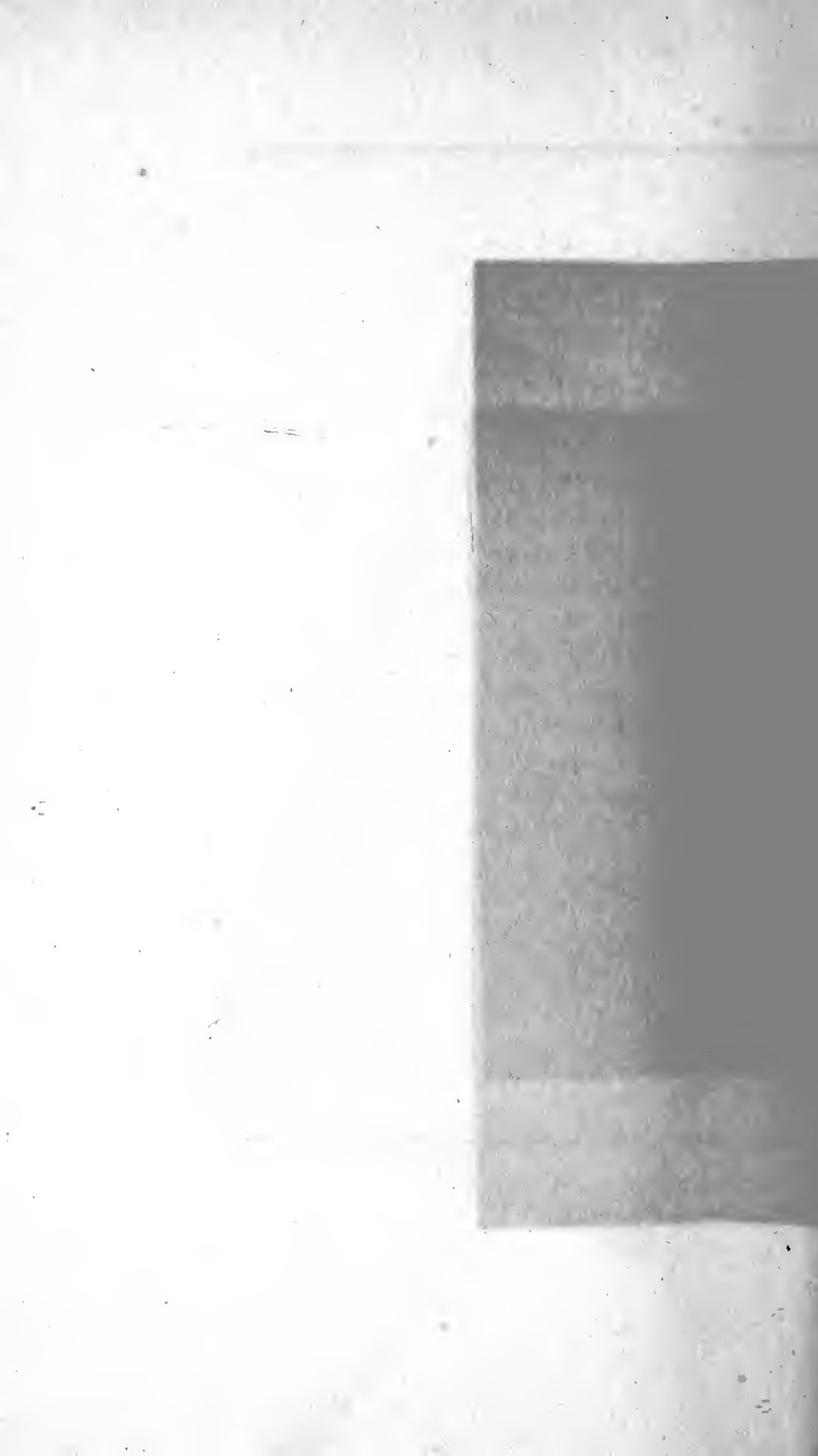
And wagged sage beards — but still none  
answered me.

When Time's pale courts are clogged with  
hopeless death,

When centuries their burdens have bestrewn  
Heaped up where none may read the deathless  
rune,

Still to thy ministry, sweet song, my breath  
Is dedicate: the everlasting tune  
Reverberate, shall yet inspire my soul  
Though ages mock, and planets cease to roll.

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V

*CONSCIENCE.*

**W**HEN changing Time hath wrought im-  
mortal truth  
And all my year in full fruition flows,  
When back from Death's pale courts, from  
Age's snows,  
I feel again the pulse of my lost youth,  
Though fadeless be the dole of all that ruth  
Wherein as some mirage my life here glows,  
If there be anything indeed that shows  
The hopeless pulse of verity uncouth,  
The message is read clear; — For yet I feel  
Through all my days a ceaseless pulse doth run  
Outwasting in it's essence e'en the sun;  
And if my earthly mission may not heal  
The spirit's penitence, still out of hell  
There tolls a warning clear as sacring-bell.

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VI  
*LARGESS*

**I**N conscious eves and consecrated morns,  
The soul descries through doubt, the verity,  
And sees ripe purpose in the years that lie  
Torn, shattered, crumbling on Tradition's horns.  
Oh! oft to him whom ev'n perdition scorns  
When Heaven nor Hell will hear his soul's  
    stark cry,  
Comes penitence and peace, he knows not why  
Nor whence that gleam that all his East adorns.

This is that dawn whose infinite hopes transcend  
All mortal cadences ; whose wakening dole  
In terraced raptures wrings his heart past pain;  
Not Death, nor Fate, nor Time, may, mocking,  
    rend  
Who spent, forlorn, divineth yet the whole  
Of his lost errantry is immortal gain.

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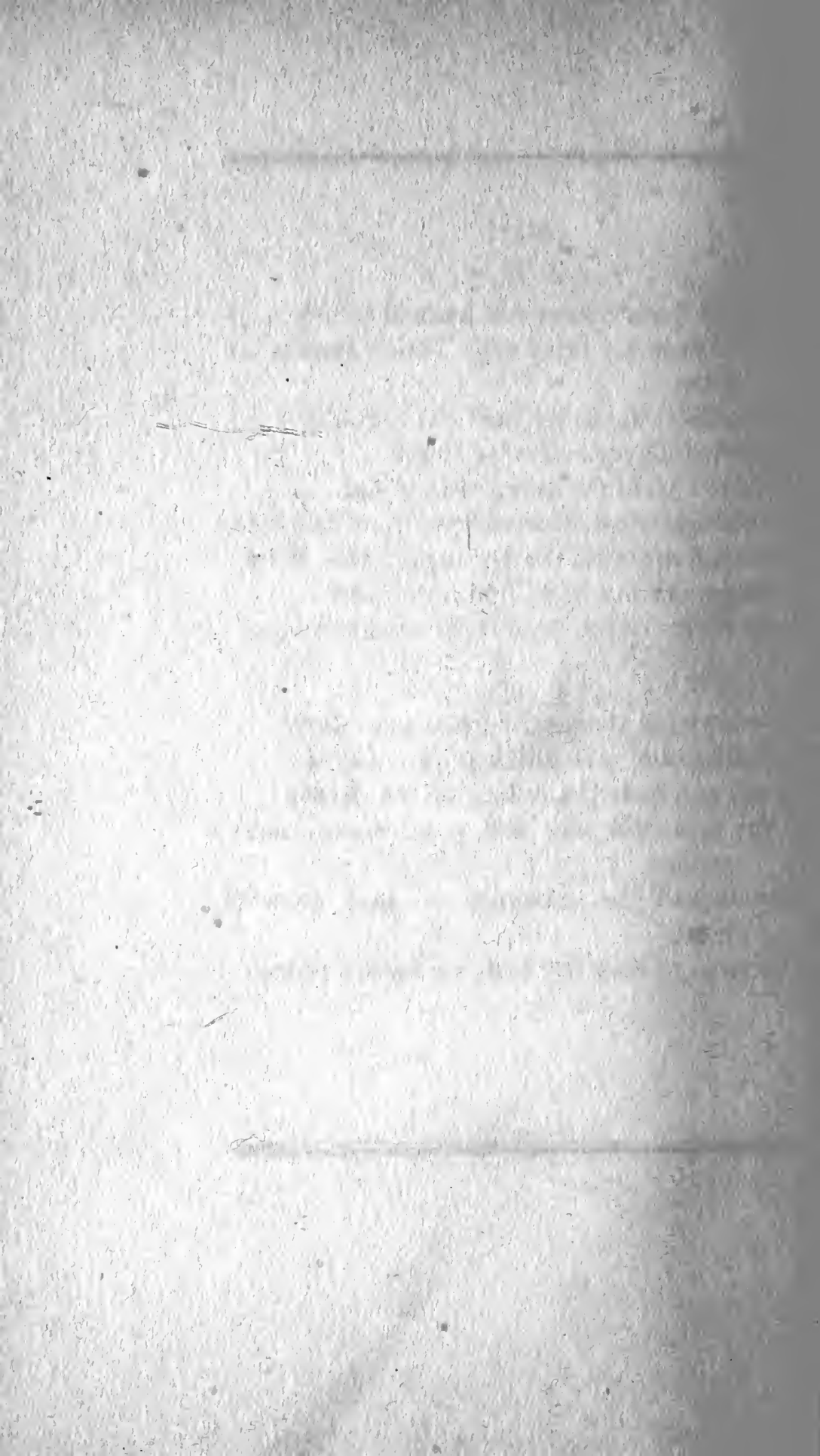
VII  
*DOGMA*

SO long hath Sorrow been my constant guest  
And Pain, his grisly fellow, shared my store,  
So long I've listened to the fool's sweet lore  
That warneth me there is no other quest,  
No other hope for mortal's sad behest,  
Than that which withereth, faileth, more and  
more,  
Until it dieth on that farther shore  
Where some still fare to find immortal rest.

For yet of these the planets have no strain;  
No music from the star's sweet symphony  
That falleth like a mantle from the sky  
Comes back to heal the blackness of this stain  
That poureth from the heavens like ceaseless  
rain  
To quench this drought in life's sad mystery.

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*Alma's 1842-1843*

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## VIII

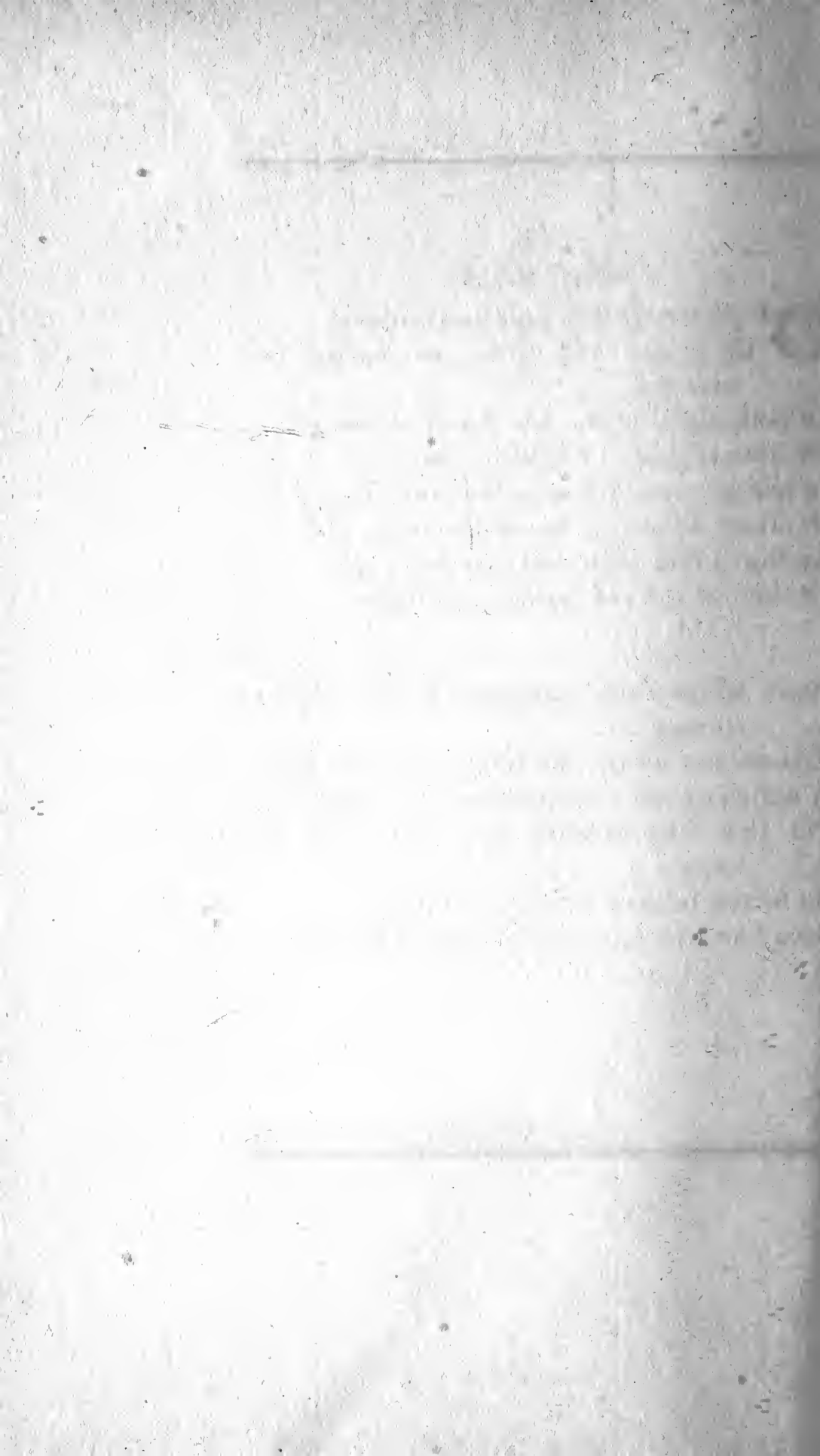
TO M. B.

**B**ECAUSE I have not learned to love a lie,  
Because my head with Time's frost is not  
hoar,

Because life chases me, and o'er and o'er  
My spirit tells me it is wise to die,  
Nathless I yield my being with a sigh,  
And though some effervescence more and more  
Doth rend me with the leavings of this Why,  
Yet always in my heart, 'twixt you and I,  
There is this question of right wisdom's core.

You counsel euthanasia — from your sanct  
And sated soul this warning ever comes,  
For me you hear the rolling of the drums  
Of the fore and aft, and stare where ready-  
ranked  
There stand the ministers of that dreadful  
hour,  
Who seem to hold my body in death's power.

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IX  
*PASSION*

**O**F perfect gold is passion's empery,  
Of prayer, and flower and leafage is it  
wrought,

Of pollen-gold of the fine flower of thought,  
Of cloth-of-gold of heavenly phantasy,  
In leafage measureless as the forest tree,  
In orison infinite as fair realms unsought,  
Saving of him alone the soul distraught  
Of time, of care, of earth's stale infamy.

Aye! Kings have conquered for it, and o'er-  
thrown

Towers and towns; the boon of one fair face  
A nation's moil, a snare to set men free;  
For this they wrestled sore, but none hath  
known

Its mortal benison of immortal grace  
Save him who hath battled with Eternity.

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X

*HER FACE*

THE morning fails, and withereth the rose.  
Alas! that spring should perish with her  
sigh!

The banners of the spirit that uprose  
On wings of hope to greet the shining sky,  
Now trailed in dust across the horizon lie,  
And in their stead a train of haggard woes,  
A ghastly penitence, a darkling cry  
O'er life's wan desert as the traveller goes.

Dawns rise and fail; yet oft for a little space  
Out from the dark there leans one face to bless,  
An angel seems to hover o'er that place  
Where erst before was toil's sad emptiness,  
And for a benison in my darkest hour  
One spirit shines clear with Heaven's holiest  
power.

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XI  
*HEAVEN*

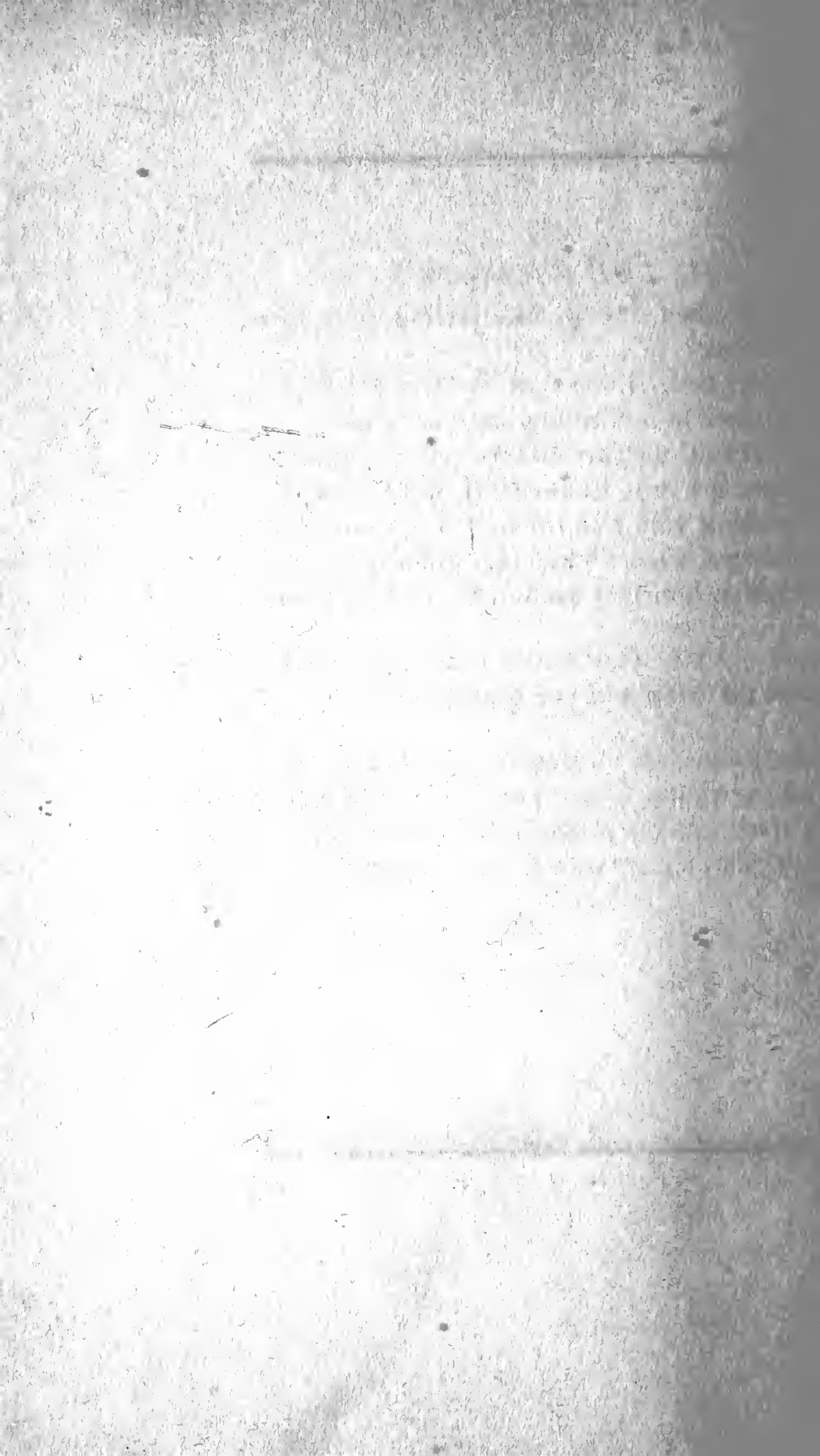
OF any penitence the soul may feel,  
There is no blessing like the strain of woe  
That comes to him whose heart shall never  
know

The joys of thy sad courts, Oh, death unreal!  
What thought of Faith the stark oppressor's heel  
We read the rubric in the overflow  
Of souls departed, whiter than the snow  
On Hermon's height, souls mad for thy strange  
weal.

Yet are we conscious of a finer gain;  
No echo from the errant spheres on high  
Comes back to wake our burden to a cry.  
We are but finite, and our earthly strain,  
Like bees 'mid clover after freshening rain,  
Is still one glad song of life's unity.

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XII  
*TO THE UNKNOWN*

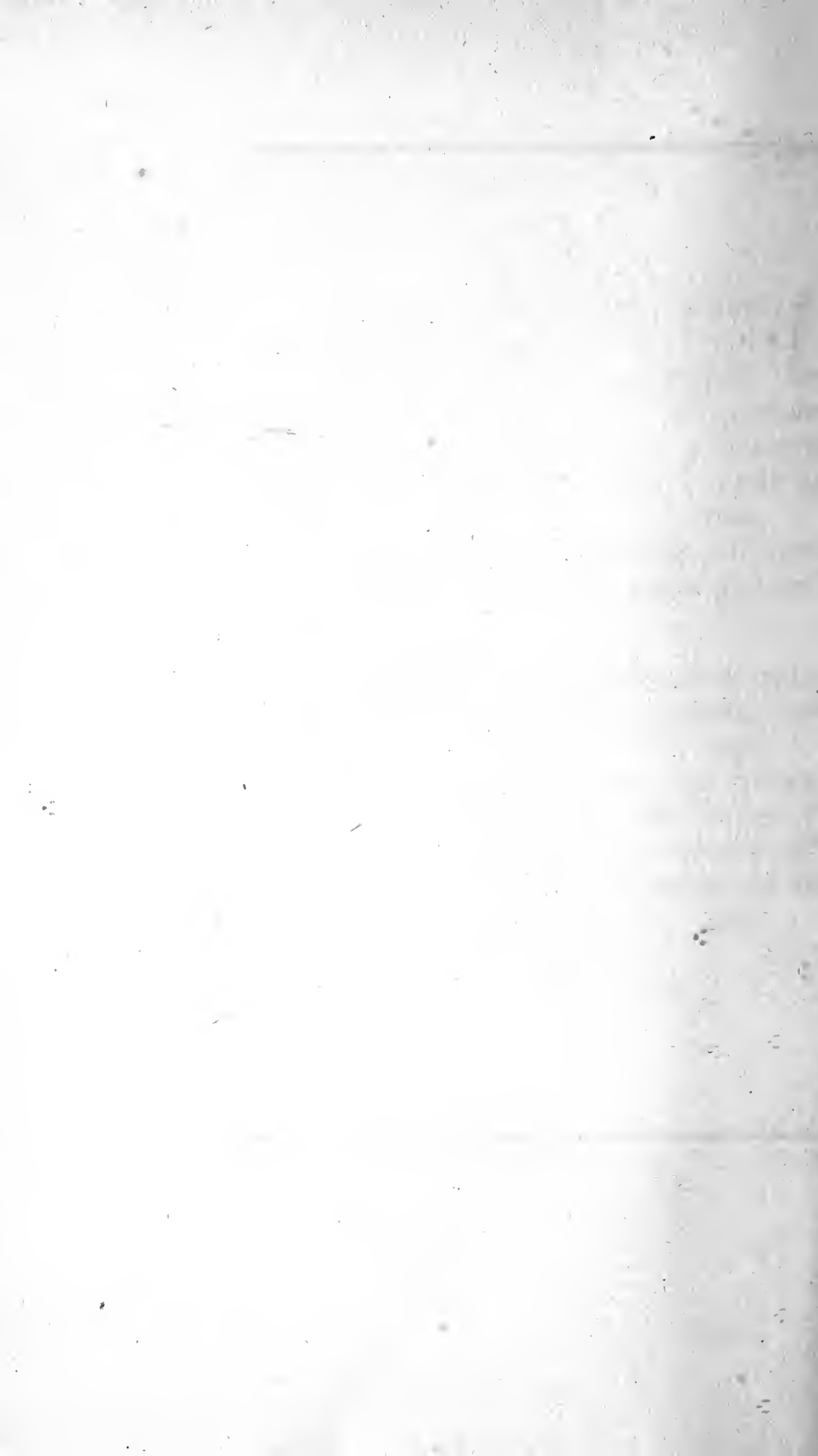
**H**OW shall I sing thee having seen thee  
once?

Let others praise thine eyes, thy voice, thy hair ;  
I chide thee not at finding thee so fair,  
Yet still could see thee beauty's show renounce.  
I marked thy mien and felt thy spirit glow  
Communing with that other by thy side  
As "Sister? Sister?" still the swelling tide  
Of question rose that marked thy soul's o'erflow.

I pass — of thee scarce seen, yet seen no more.  
Accept the tribute of one gracious hour.

I cannot call thee, musing on thee, aught  
Of all the names Love's phantasy doth boast ;  
Thy spirit fills my presence like the Host ;  
I kneel afar, a reverence in my thought!

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### XIII

TO A. B.

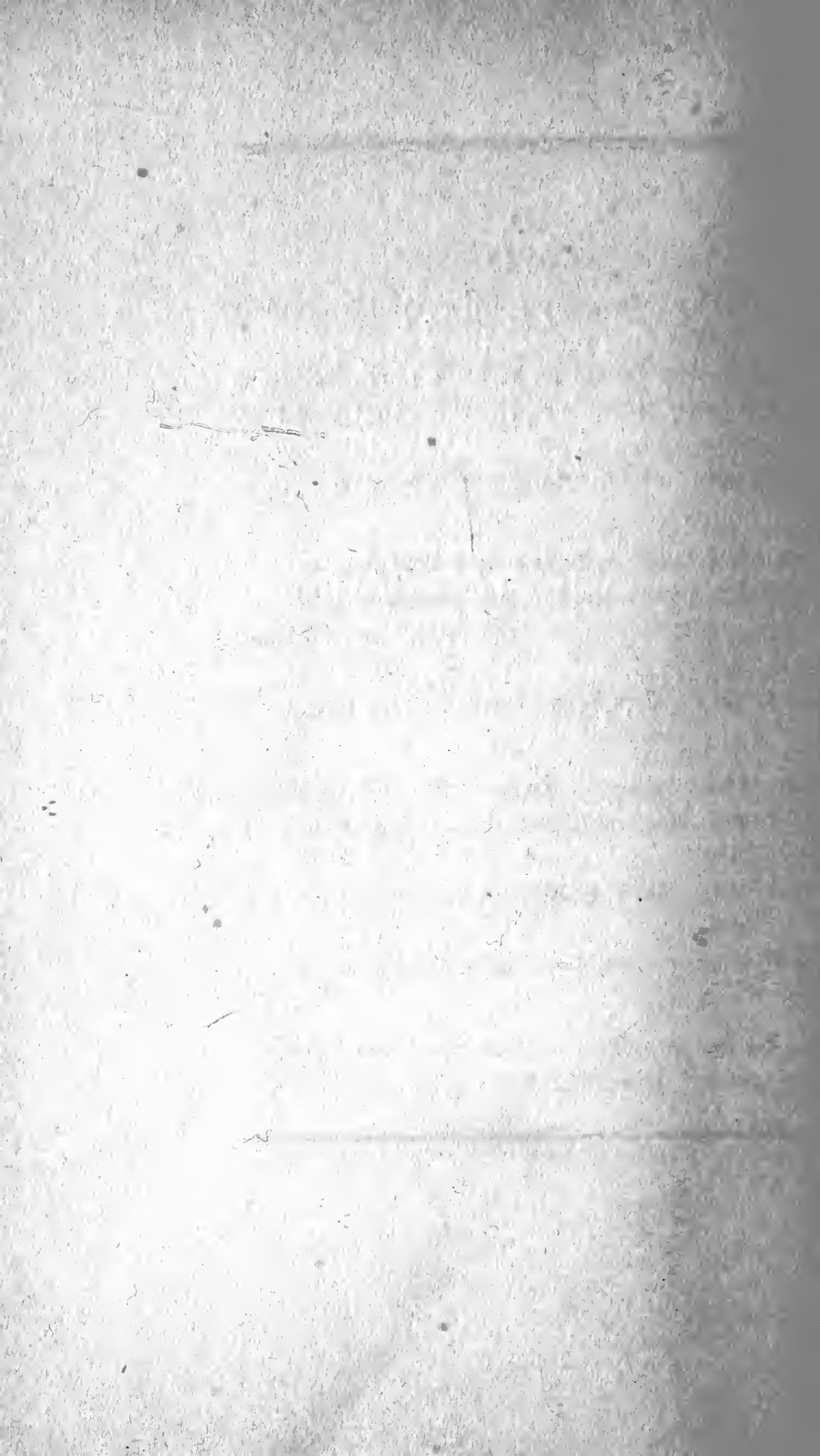
**I**N darkling deeps, my spirit's sepulchre,  
I felt a ray that pierced those depths divine,  
And "entering defeat as 'twere a shrine"  
Bade cease the tumult of the days that were.  
Far-sounding thence I heard the dividing year  
Call cleaving down the slope where no stars  
shine.

I knew the voice, dear life, was only thine;  
I heard thy wings and smelt the breath of myrrh.

And yet 'twas song's grace only. From our dark  
There gleams no ray but this; Ah! hopeless  
here

We strive and sever. In drear ways and stark  
We vex our toil with visions of that sphere  
Whence beams an orison which none may know  
Save him whose heart hath wept the immortal  
woe.

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XIV  
*GUERDON*

I WOULD when from this clay the Spirit's  
fled

And men, my brethren, tell I'm past and gone  
Beyond their ken, whiles still they neighbor  
one

A wanderer 'mid the mazes of the dead,

That some shall still recall my best estate,  
In my dead days discern the thread of gold,  
And say "His heart was light though pain waxed  
old,

And Grief's gaunt finger beckoned at his gate ;"

That "Once his eyes shone soft with reveries,  
"And once his voice told something sweet to  
hear,

"And once there glistened heavenly dew—a  
tear,

"That won our souls to highest harmonies."

This be my guerdon. — This the fame I seek,  
Mine answer when the final morn shall break !

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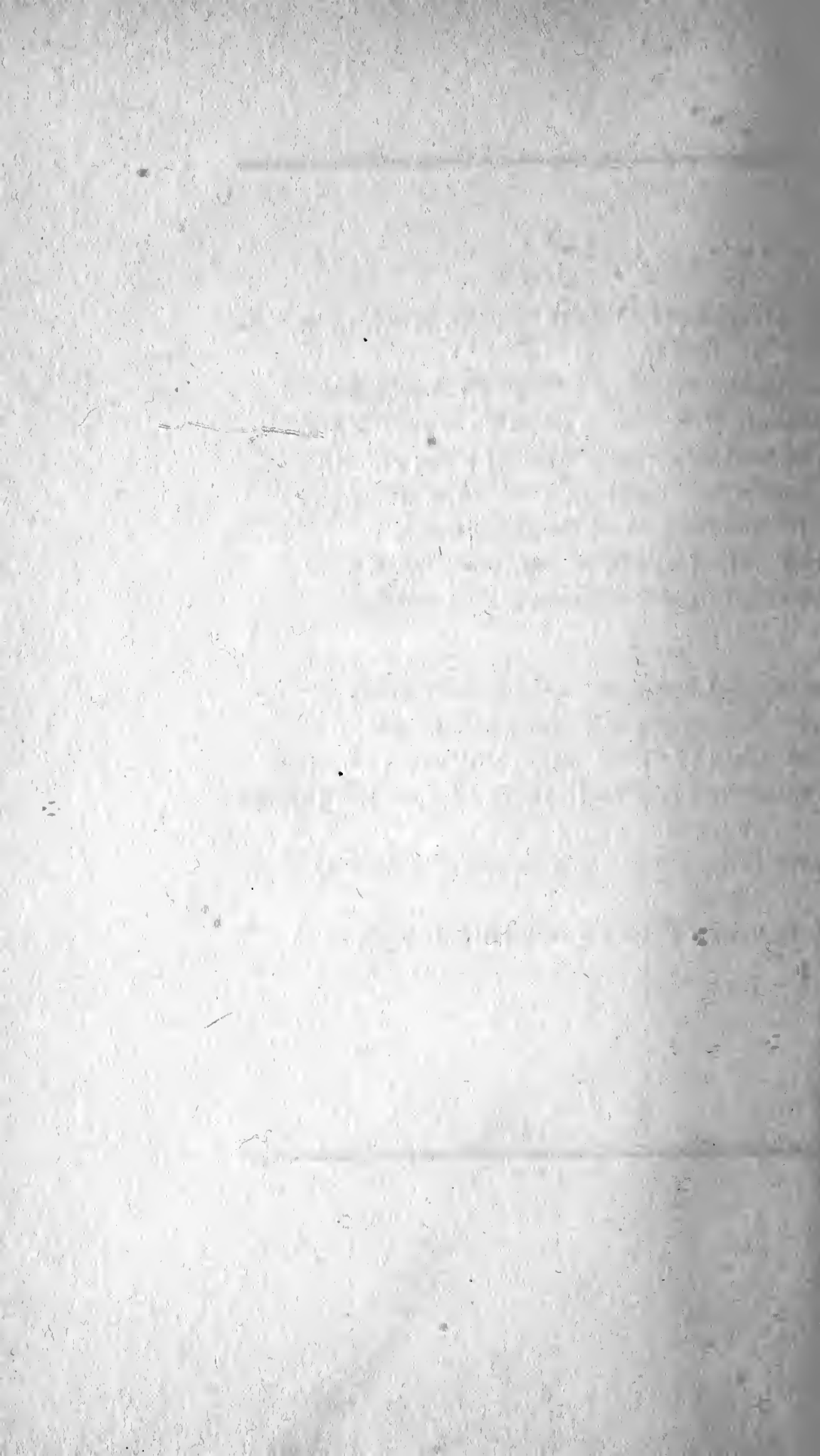
XV

*FULFILLMENT*

OF any verity strange song is wrought,  
Of any hope that mortal man may feel,  
Of any effluence of woe or weal,  
Of any offering to Time's altar brought.  
And yet erstwhile my spirit often sought  
For far strange sight, unwept, uncouth, unreal.  
The doom that bound sad Ixion to his wheel  
Was mine; the while my vision swept distraught  
Those darkling realms whence none the spark  
may steal.

Song's light is here; the soul's fond offering  
Is quenched of woe in no sad realm but this.  
The day-star from on high, alas! will spring  
For him who seeks a heaven's supernal bliss  
Only in heart-hopes that have grown more dear,  
As greening leaves that Autumn's winds turn  
sere.

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XVI  
*LOVE*

I DREAMED that Love a store of secrets  
held:

A mighty mystery, — that all man knew  
And all he felt were but this monarch's due,  
The end, beginning from the days of eld;  
That by his mastery he all lives did weld  
Into one portion of the days anew;  
And yet, afar, amain, one voice held true,  
And ever nearer, clearer, still it swelled.

So when I came to read his holy rune,  
I saw it was not all; tides of the sea,  
And moan of forest trees, and stress of song,  
Aye, and things lesser, these though they might  
wrong,  
Were more than Love to some men, and their  
tune  
More music than his heavenly symphony.

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XVII  
*ENVOY*

**W**HERE in the twilight terraces of Time  
There glows a light of mortal mystery,  
Men shall recall one voice and shuddering cry :  
“ This were the fool who wrought the foolish  
rhyme,  
“ The sonneteer, half-demon and half-mime,  
“ Who swept the heavens with his darkling eye,  
“ Who sought to find the vision in the sigh  
“ Of us who weep a God-head’s shallow crime.”

Here where my penitence may not avail,  
Where hopes like roses leaf by leaf shall fall,  
Where dreams are but the shadow of the pall,  
I cry “ Farewell ! ” — and yet “ Farewell and  
hail ! ”

The perfect soul shall die — the lost soul, free,  
Will wander singing in eternity.

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*Made from*

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XVIII  
*MAMMON*

TO M. A. H.

CLEAR-EYED and calm, thou seest that  
the years  
Have wrought the verdict of the days to be ;  
That we have bought with too much liberty  
This boon of altars stained with blood and tears ;  
That freedom and the recompense of fears  
Are but the weakling's boast, the lordling's fee,  
Our lordlings of the mart, the land, the sea,  
Whose shrine is where the Golden Idol leers.

Come promises of Peace : Come Hope's fair  
wile,  
These are mirages in thy vision clear,  
The effigies of usurers that beguile  
With honeyed words alike the slave, the seer ;  
Thou like a banner 'mid this western gale  
Can'st read God's message where republics fail.

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XIX  
*REMORSE*

**I**N springs of being that have cast their  
shades

O'er Death's dank deeps to where the spirit  
glows

Like to the sun on Himalaya's snows,  
There lurks a memory that never fades,  
A sense of dole that hardly retrogrades  
Though life's strong soul the secret seldom  
knows,

Wrestling in vain, until it overthrows  
The legions hoar that haunt the infernal glades.

Fled from the dark and doubt to summits clear  
The soul looks back in heavenly empery  
The regions of its pasture to descry,  
And wakes the starry echoes without fear.  
Yet still, though ever higher mounts its ken,  
It masks the footprints of that noisome fen.





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XX  
*MUSIC*

O MUSIC, cease, thou dost my spirit wrong;  
Cease, lest the whole of life's strange  
symphony

Shall be translated of the soul of thee,  
And all thy melting raptures endless throng  
In sorrow's sadness all my days along,  
Cease! lest my spirit cease in ecstasy, —  
The joy of hope, the calm of days to be,  
The last fond echo of my hopeless song!

O music, thou art fear and hope and pain  
And love's glad pleasaunce, and the saving strife  
Of passion; and the lust of days still rife  
With expectation; and thou art the strain  
That follows madness to her prison cell,  
And mak'st desire chime like a funeral knell.

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XXI\*

*HIS OWN*

AND ever, and yet ever, these the mock  
Of worldly ones, who know not what they  
do,

Who sup up peace as 'twere the morning dew  
And mark not Virtue's heavenly standards  
flock

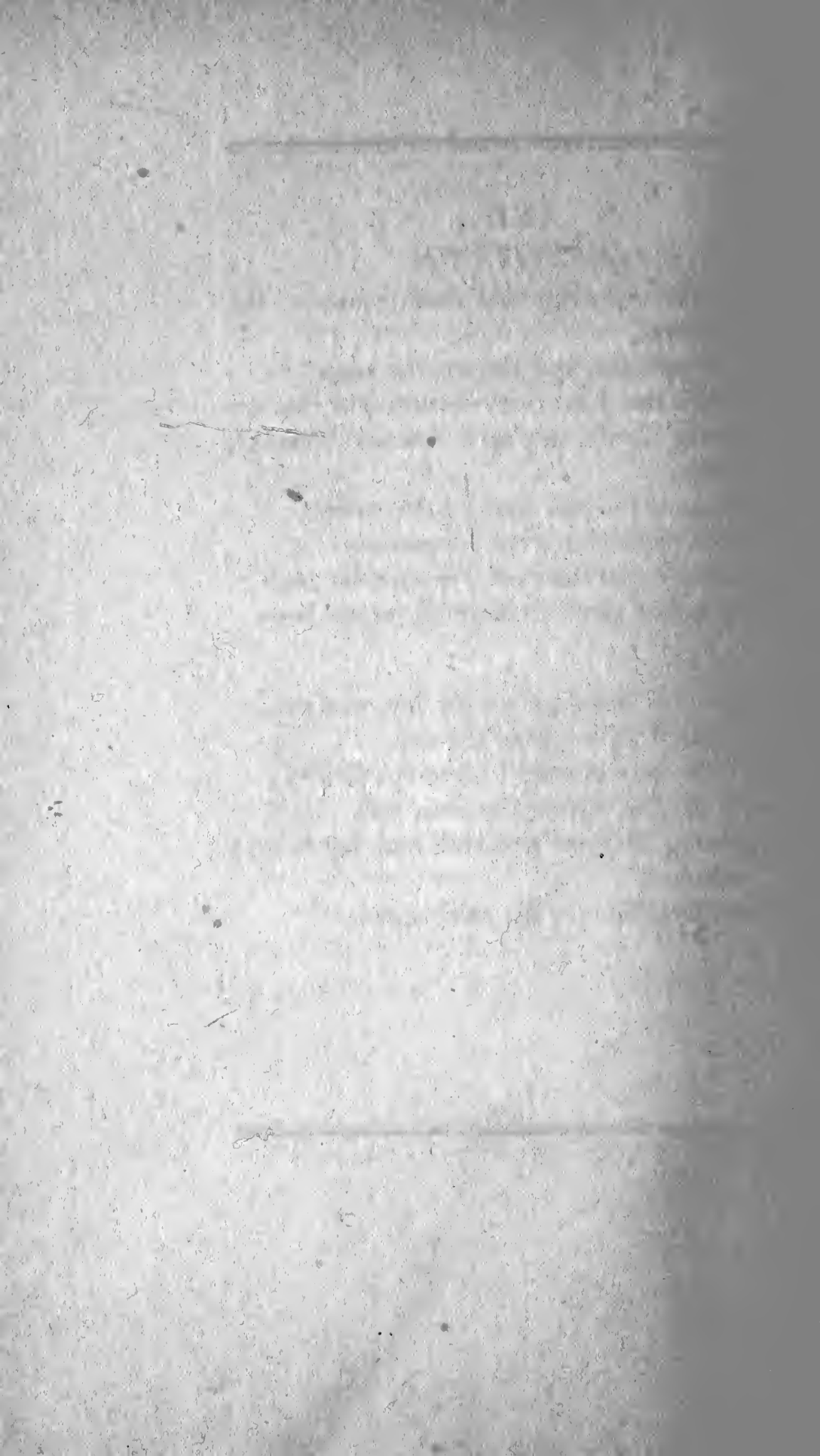
To succor him whose heart is as the rock,  
While theirs as water changeth every hue  
'Neath doubt's pale moon that vagrom clouds  
endue

Till light and life are but a passing shock, —

They shall abide forever; but the moil  
Of worldlings and their vain ways shall endure  
As chaff before the thresher, as the mist  
That harboreth alone where clouds are sure,  
Dark following doubt, till penitence past toil  
They seek no benison in the Mouth that kissed  
The feet of them that followed, mean and poor!

\* A Calvinistic Collect.

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XXII

*INFINITUDE*

**T**O make one song that shall transcend the  
spheres,

Inherit all spheres, and yet wander nigh  
Here where the East doth circumvent the sky  
Here where God's daylight filtereth through  
tears,

To wipe away the sad stain of the years,  
To turn to pæan-chant the human cry,  
To wrest one coal from off Time's altar high,  
One spark that shalt cremate all mortal fears:

This were the birthright of the haunted soul,  
The alnage of philosophy, the dole  
Of him who sets himself to find the Grail;  
But only his the vision, the clear toll,  
Who passing Heaven and Hell hath felt earth's  
whole  
Equation tremble, nor his spirit quail.

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XXIII\*

*REMBRANDT*

**T**HAT is the portrait of the Burgomaster;  
Turn where you will, somehow those honest eyes

Will follow you about — Strange, is it not,  
The haunting charm? — 'Tis but a simple face,  
That of a man — The Burgomaster Six.  
Who was the fellow? Lord! we cannot tell;  
He's known to fame but as you see him there,  
The sturdy Burgomaster in his ruff!

He speaks from out the canvas — Aye! he lives  
For us again, we know him as he moved  
In the grave round of that quaint sober life;  
He tells a tale of other times long fled;  
He is alive — and here! though centuries dead,  
Nay! 'Tis the master's touch that lives in us!

\* In the Hague Gallery.

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XXIV

TO C. H.

O soul of dull cold marble, light of art,  
Thyself the sculptor's dream, refulgent,  
free;

Say, what Pygmalion hath fashioned thee;  
What spirit quickened thee; set thee apart  
To give the insensate stone thy throbbing  
heart,

Bid thine own marble live in ecstasy!  
The muses named thee — smiled on Destiny  
And craved her crown thee scathless from  
Time's dart.

Thy soul hath walked in rapture long ago,  
A gleaner in the groves of Academe.  
To thee grave Phidias his craft hath shown;  
The Attic brede hath been thy waking dream,  
Art's new Hypatia — for to this allied,  
Thy wide-eyed soul hath art revived.



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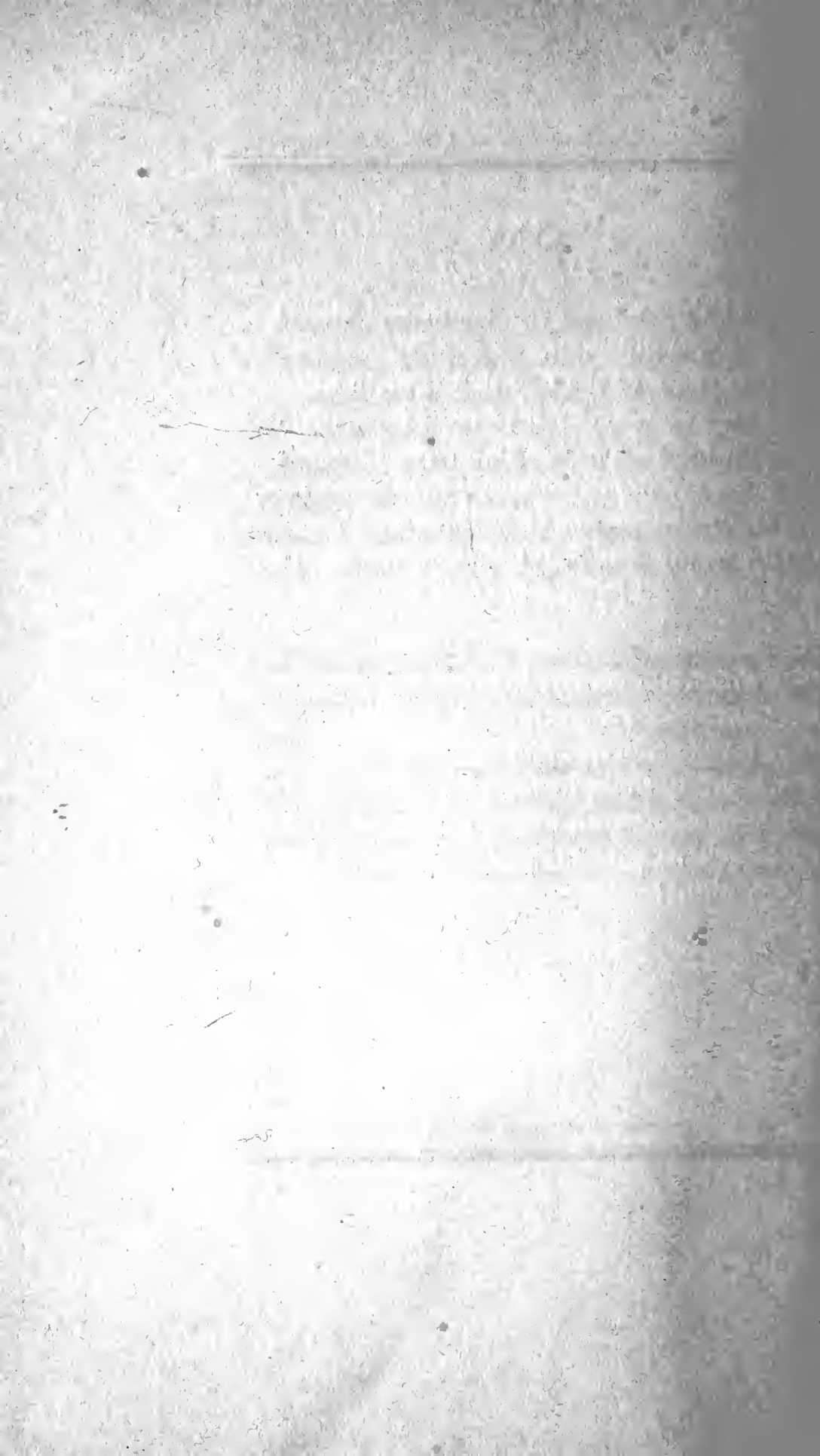
XXV  
*DESPAIR*

OH! that mine eyes could feel that long-sought light,  
The dawning of the day that cometh not.  
Years have I wandered where I have no lot —  
No part nor purpose — In a day of night!  
I stretch my hands and cry; my wearied soul  
Pines for deliverance from this dull thrall;  
Oh! why, my Sin, hast thou encompassed all  
The good, and left me but this awful dole?

Black night descends! Is there no recompense?  
I tear me like Prometheus in his chains,  
God, let thy Son descend and bear me hence!  
Scourged by these furies of my soul, my pains  
Me compass as with fire — No hope! no light!  
Fate beckons with his pall. Welcome Death's  
night!

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XXVI

TO P. H.

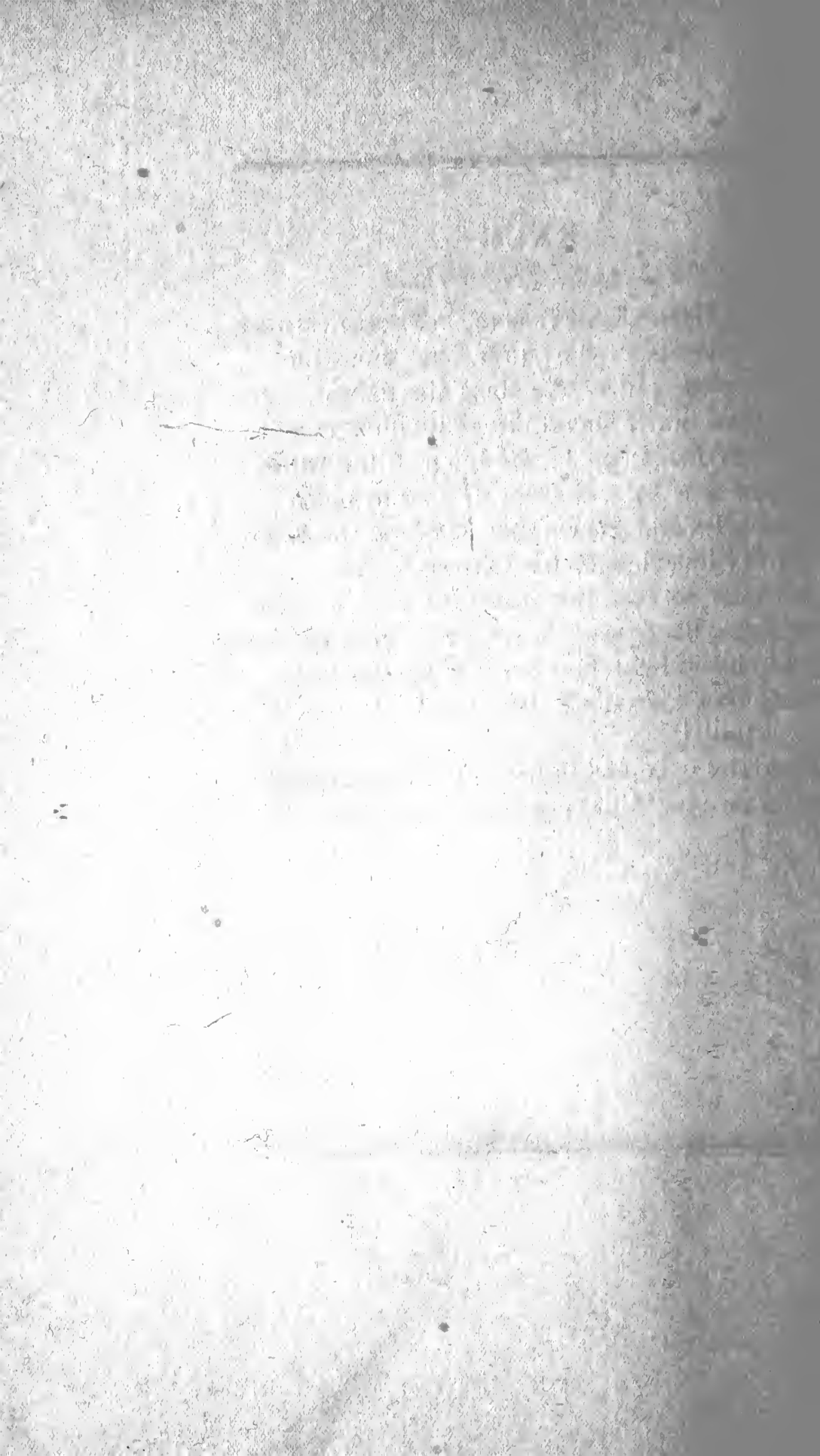
**T**O find the heart of Thackeray beneath  
A Yankee's shirt, to feel the human glow  
Of that great pulse that never lilted slow,  
That kept in every throb true manhood's faith,  
That through all tides of ministry till death  
With hope, with joyance, bravely did bestow  
His life's broad page with blossomings that show  
In fair strong flowers fed with immortal breath.

The loudest laugh since Rabelais and the best.  
The keenest point since Junius trimmed a  
quill! —

Ah! Attic delver of our brawling West,  
In thee we hail this rare succession still.  
Like him lives in thy prose's cadenced chime  
At once the wit, philosopher, and mime.

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XXVII

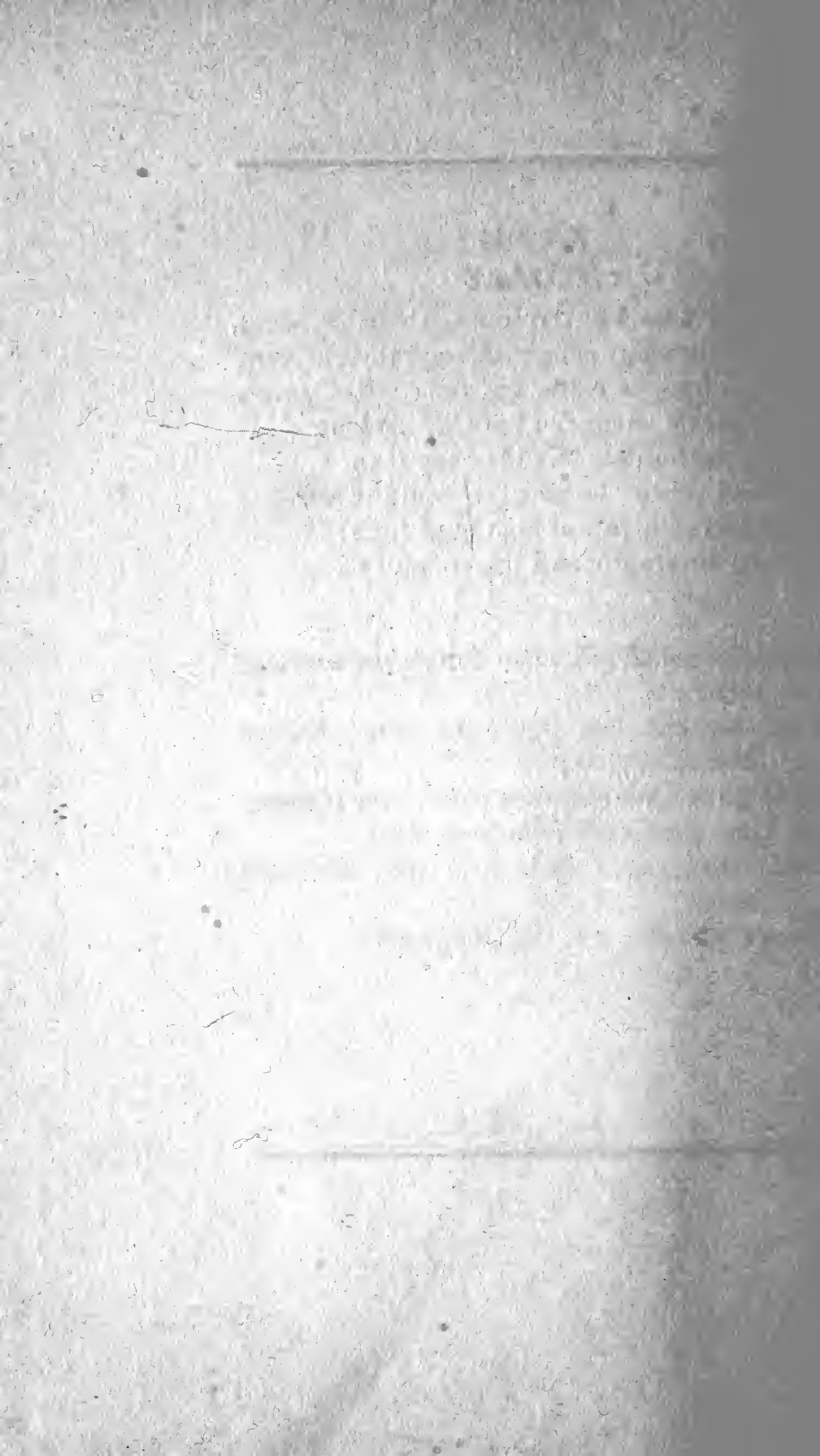
*TO LACHRYMOSA*

**I** LOVE thee, Lachrymosa,—therefore, sweet,  
I'll whisper thee a secret, lend thine ear,  
A little closer, love, that thou mayst hear,  
That thou and I should know alone is meet.  
Yet, sweetheart, 'tis an old song; if the world  
Do pass thee by and seem to hold in scorn  
Those gifts and graces that outshine the morn,  
If all thy lovers walk with favors furled  
And none do vow, nor waste his soul in sighs,  
Nor swear his passion deathless by your eyes,—  
And chiefest him thou lov'st of all the rest,  
Seeing thee distraught, who mocks thee with a  
jest;

This know: mankind is moody. Time hath seen  
The blind god fickle even to his queen!

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XXVIII

*WOMAN*

**O**F her who was the soul-space of my song,  
Whose effigy of light through rayless years,  
Through front of battle and the clash of spears,  
The ineffable energies of my life prolong  
Be this the burden, this the evensong.  
O perfect peace! O balm! O heart of tears!  
O panoply of love and hope past fears!  
To thee the sceptre and the crown belong.

When tides shall fail, when droops the morning  
star,  
When heaven's last sigh hath swept Earth's  
threshing-floor,  
While grow life's choruses from more to more.  
Till Time itself shall echo from afar,  
Thou! only thou! shalt live, the dawning's  
beam,  
The soul's desire, and the aftergleam!

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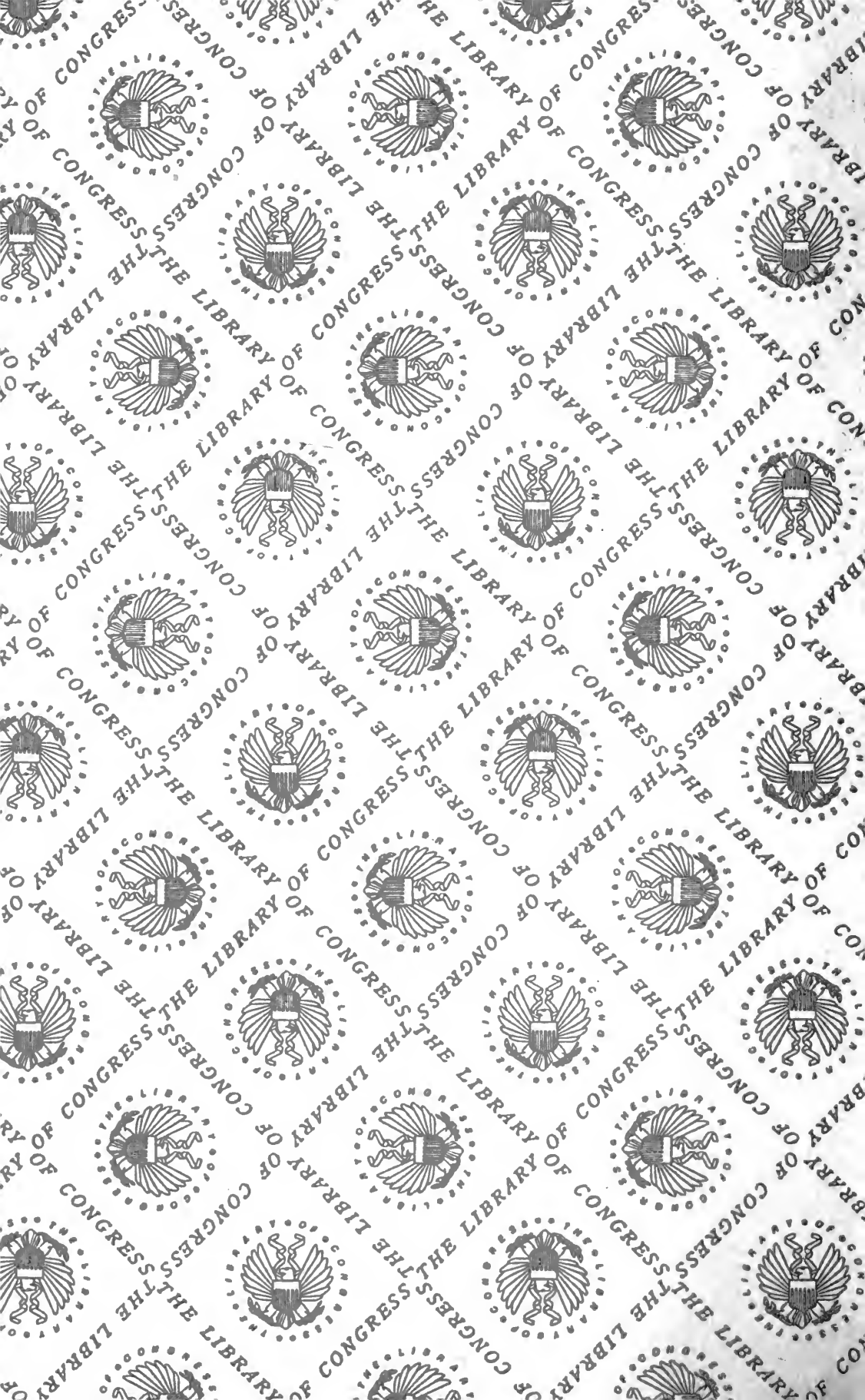
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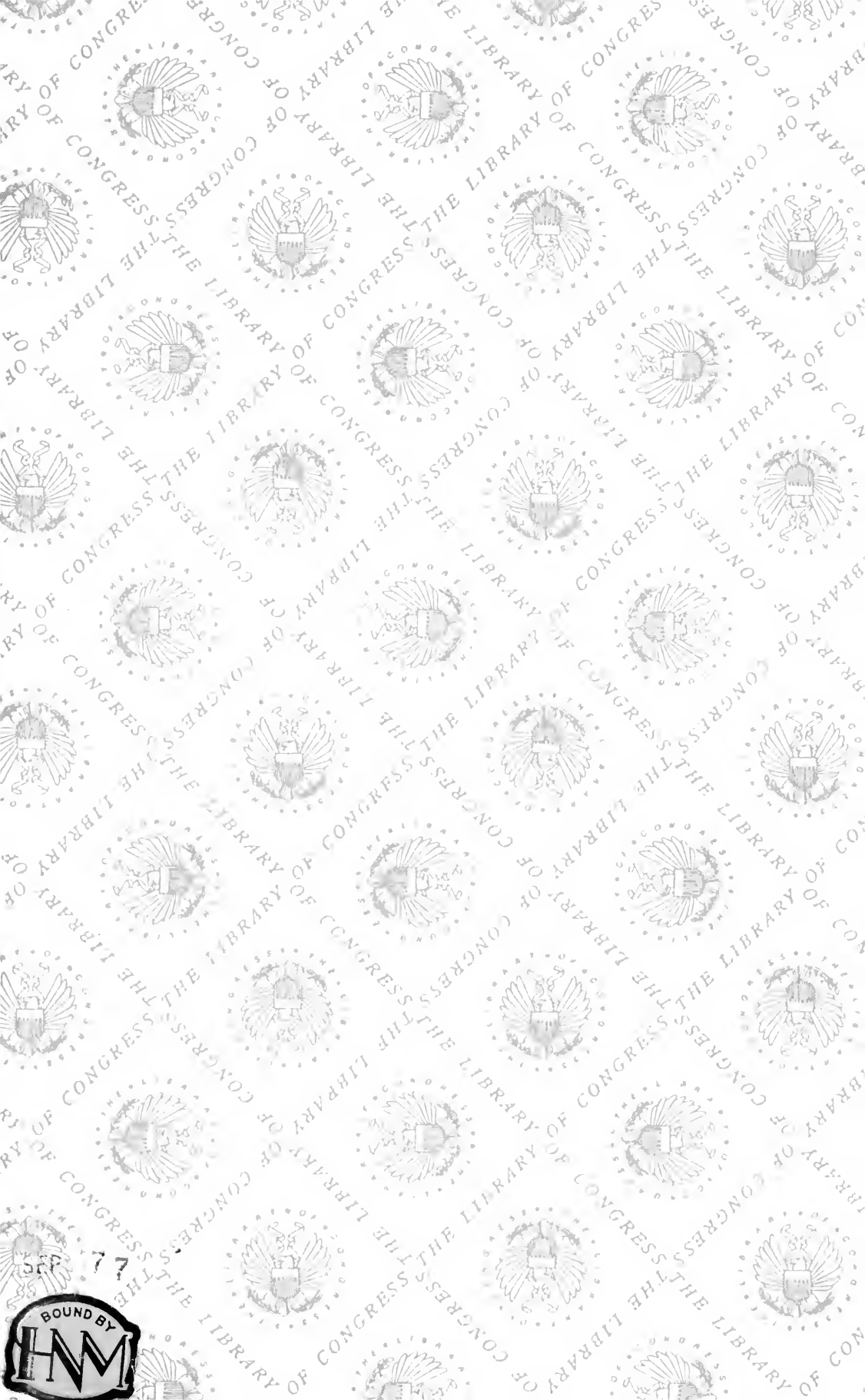
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